

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 318

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

May 13, 1935

FORD'S THEATRE PLAY BILLS

Inasmuch as the program giving the cast of characters for "Our American Cousin" was probably the last printed announcement which Lincoln held in his hand, it has had an unusual sentimental value.

Every collector of Lincolniana has hoped that at some time he might own a copy of a Ford's Theatre play bill distributed on the day of the President's assassination. An attempt to satisfy this desire has been made at various times by the printing of facsimiles which in many instances have been accepted as authentic.

Many years ago *The Boston Transcript*, desiring to advise people that many of the copies of the play bills looked upon as original were but facsimiles, attempted to draw certain marks of distinction between the originals and the facsimiles. This article seemed to be such an important contribution that it was reprinted by *The Magazine of History* in their Rare Lincolniana Issue No. 3.

Many who read the article, after checking up on their copies of the play bill, were surprised to find that, according to the description given, what they had supposed to be one of the originals was but a facsimile. Apparently the deductions of the contributor of the article were never questioned and the cherished relic was laid aside as undesirable.

The Lincoln National Life Foundation owns a play bill which it has every reason to believe is an original edition but which is classified by the *Transcript* article as an early reprint. This difference of opinion as to the peculiarities of the original copy is responsible for the conclusions presented.

The First Edition

The Ford's Theatre play bill for "Friday Evening, April 14, 1865," announced the "Benefit and Last Night of Miss Laura Keene," who would appear in "Tom Taylor's Celebrated Eccentric Comedy Our American Cousin." The bill was printed as usual on poor paper with no special attention given to discarding worn type.

In the printing of the bills, apparently in an attempt to get the proper adjustment for the gauge pins in the process of printing, the type was flattened at both places where it came in contact with the pins. In the third line of type the final figure was made indiscernible, the end of the rule under it was shortened and the two last letters in the word "manager," in the fifth line, were also crushed in the same process.

The mutilation at the other point in the type where the gauge pin made contact is found in the printed cast of players. It flattened the final letter "e" in the name Keene, the final "t" in the name Dyott just under it, the letter "k" in the name Hawk, and also the letter "y" in the name Gourlay.

There was also one other very noticeable defect in the printing which was evidently due to worn type. In the name Laura Keene which reached across the sheet the down stroke of the final capital "E" failed to print clearly. The mutilations at all of these points were allowed to go without changing the type.

At the foot of the bill there appeared five lines as follows:

THE PRICES OF ADMISSION

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Orchestra | \$1.00 |
| Dress Circle and Parquette..... | .75 |
| Family Circle | .25 |
| Private Boxes | \$6 and \$10 |

J. R. FORD, Business Manager

H. Polkinhorn, Printers, D. Street
near 7th, Washington, D. C.

The Second Edition

Some time during the morning of April 14, after the regular bills had been printed, it was learned that President Lincoln and his wife would attend the performance that night and that they would probably be accompanied by General Grant and his wife.

General Grant had appeared before few Washington audiences and his late victories which had closed the war made him a favorite with the people. It was undoubtedly due to the announcement that he would likely be present that the management of the theatre decided to strike off another bill largely in his honor. The form which had been used for printing the regular bill was still standing and it was decided to eliminate some unnecessary lines and include a "Patriotic Song and Chorus" entitled "Honor to our Soldiers."

The eliminating and condensing of type in the standing form made necessary by this inclusion of the poem caused the names of "Mr. John Dyott" and "Mr. Harry Hawk" which had occupied three lines in the original copy to be reduced to one line by leaving out the "Mr." before each name and eliminating all unnecessary space. In the cast of characters the name "Rasper, a groom" was eliminated altogether. The lines giving the price of admission at the bottom of the bill and the manager's name which fol-

lowed were omitted, but the printer saw to it that his line remained in the copy.

The soldier's song was inserted directly under the cast of characters. The mutilated letters in the third and fifth lines of the bill were allowed to remain, but the damaged type in the printing of the cast of characters was replaced as well as the large worn final "E" in the name Keene.

This second edition is the one used on the night of the performance but many of the first edition had been distributed so that there were two different bills in the hands of the guests of the theatre that night.

Reprints

If any reprints were made the next day, as has often been alleged, it is likely that the type already set containing the soldier's song would be used for that purpose but it is difficult to identify such reprints and it is very doubtful if such copies were made. It is quite likely that some of the earlier first edition prints were available after the second edition had been printed and used the night before and these might have been distributed on April 15.

One of the most widely circulated reprints inserts immediately under the line "Friday Evening, April 14, 1865," these words in three lines:

THIS EVENING

The Performance will be honored by
the presence of

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

This insertion was made in order that the bill might be associated directly with Lincoln but there is no good evidence that it was printed until sometime after the assassination of the President.

With the exception of the notice about the President, the bill is copied from the first edition but in the line containing the words "Boureicault's Sensational Drama" two changes in spelling are noted: "Boucicault's Sensation Drama." The printer in some instances is L. Brown; and there is also one similar to it by H. Polkinhorn & Son, who do not make the mistakes in spelling but reproduce the line mentioned above as it appears in the original.

This is not an attempt to list the very many facsimiles which have been printed from the first and second editions but will allow one to identify either original copy as well as reprints of the two used on April 14, 1865.